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HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941
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Native Plant Profile...Alternate-leaf Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*)

This native plant can be considered a shrub or small tree that can reach to 30 feet. Commonly found on rich moist soils in woodlands, woodland edges, stream banks. Tolerates sun or shade and a wide variety of soil types. It exhibits slow to moderate growth. Known for being disease resistant.

**Alternate-leaf Dogwood
provides use for at least
64 species of wildlife, 43
that are birds.**

Other Names: Pagoda Dogwood, Blue Dogwood, Green Osier, and Pigeon Berry. The name Pigeon Berry was given to the tree due to the fact that its berry was a favorite of the now extinct Passenger Pigeon

Flowers/Fruits: Greenish white, 4-petal flowers bloom in May – June. Purple to blue-black drupes (berries) 1/3" on red stems ripen from July to September



Alternate-leaf Dogwood provides food for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Common Flicker, Pileated, Redheaded and Downy Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Kingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Common Crow, Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood, Hermit, Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos, Scarlet Tanager, Cardinal, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeak, White-throated and Song Sparrow, Black Bear, Beaver, Cottontail Rabbit, Raccoon, Striped Skunk, Gray Squirrel, Fox Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk, White-footed Mouse, Allegheny Wood Rat, White-tailed Deer, and Spring Azure Butterfly

Alternate-leaf Dogwood provides shelter for: Turkey, Ruffed grouse, Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Scarlet Tanager, Purple Finch

Alternate-leaf Dogwood provides nesting sites for: Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Scarlet Tanager

Landscape Notes: Stunning specimen as either a shrub or tree. Needs no pruning. Has a fibrous root system. One of the earliest trees to change color in the fall to maroon foliage. Cultivar often found at commercial nurseries is Argentina

Maryland Wildlife: American Vultures

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) and Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)



Vultures are interesting and essential birds that help keep our ecosystem clean. Two species are found in the Eastern U.S.: Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), pictured on the left, and Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*), pictured below on the right. Both species are

common in their range and the range continues to expand northward.

These species of vulture are scavengers that feed on fresh carrion. The birds tend to eat dead herbivores consuming the carrion of carnivores if there is a food shortage. American Vultures can locate food by sight and smell, with the Turkey Vulture having the more acute sense of smell. Black Vultures rely mostly on their vision to locate food.

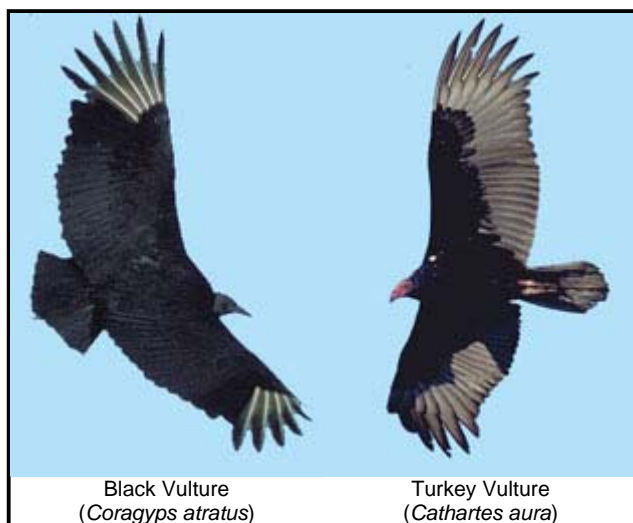
Contrary to myth neither species of bird circle over dying animals. Instead the birds soar for hours on thermals of warm air to conserve energy in flight. They will glide until reaching the altitude they need for observation of food. In flight Black Vultures flap their wings more than Turkey Vultures. To identify the species in flight note that Black Vultures have a wing span less than 5' with a short tail and a distinct white patch restricted to the outer wings. Often the feet are sticking out beyond the tail. Turkey Vultures are nearly eagle sized in flight with a 6' wingspread. They soar with wings in a slight V shape. Their tail is long.



The head of a Turkey Vulture is small, bare and red with the immature gray looking and being similar to the black head of the Black Vulture. With no feathers on their heads this enables the birds to get into all sorts of dead animals and stay disease-free. After eating Vultures will perch in full sun getting the rays to bake off animal matter.

Vultures have blunt claws not the sharp talons of hawks. Their feet are considered weak as compared to raptors, with elevated hind toes to aid in walking. The birds cannot carry their food off but can stand on it. Often Vultures have difficulty taking off the ground after consuming a meal, hopping around until gaining flight.

Black Vultures are more aggressive than Turkey Vultures and are known for stealing food sources from them. Both species are highly social, with the birds roosting in trees in groups of 10 or more. Vultures are also known for playful activity in flight and on the roost.



Neither vulture species makes much of a vocalization as they lack voice boxes. Black Vultures can hiss or grunt. Turkey Vultures will grunt and hiss while eating, or at the nest.

Vultures do not make much of a nest. Black Vultures will lay 2 white-gray green eggs on the ground, under rocks, in a log, or cave. Turkey Vultures also produce 2 eggs yearly, which are white, marbled with dark brown in a crevice, tree cavity or hollow log. Both species produce one brood per season, with incubation averaging 38 days, with the peak nesting time from April to May. Vultures fledge their young in approximately 70 days. The young are fed entirely on regurgitated food by both parents. If threatened the young will vomit on any intruder. The young will stay with the parents in social groups for years.

Both Federal and state laws protect Black and Turkey Vultures. Vultures are often called Buzzards. This is not a correct term. It is thought that early English settlers used this term to describe all soaring, hawk-like species. Vultures will occasionally consume vegetable matter, as they are known to enjoy eating pumpkins.



Backyard Hawk Watching

Fall is the best time to watch the spectacular hawk migrations. A diversity of raptors including eagles, falcons, and ospreys join hawks for this seasonal flight to their winter homes. Regionally, the mid-Atlantic raptor migrations are reliably one of the most thrilling wildlife watching spectacles to experience in the fall. It's not surprising that the science of hawk watching originated in the Eastern U.S.

Hawk watching months run from September to November. September skies belong to Broad-winged Hawks, Bald Eagles and Ospreys. October brings Sharp-shinned, Cooper's and Red-shouldered hawks, Northern Harriers, and Northern Goshawks. You might even spot Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, American Kestrels, Merlins and Peregrine Falcons. Red-tailed Hawks claim the skies as their highways in November. Other wildlife that you can observe migrating include ravens, loons and Monarch butterflies.



Most of the mid-Atlantic region's well-known hotspots occur near Maryland, in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and West Virginia. These spots are located either on the coast or along mountain ridges. Maryland has both. You may be fortunate enough to have your backyard in these areas, although most locations in the state will provide some hawk watching.

The best hawk times range from September 15 to October 30. Early October has the most diversity. The most commonly seen hawks in Maryland include Broad-winged Hawks, American Kestrels, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks. Other birds seen on a regular basis include Turkey Vultures, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed hawks, Ospreys, Northern Harriers, Bald and Golden eagles, Peregrine Falcons and Merlin's.

Gear to have with you for hawk watching include binoculars or spotting scopes and field guides. Be sure to dress warmly since you may be standing for long periods of time in cold weather. Weather can make or break hawk watching. The best flights occur with the

arrival of a cold front and northwest winds. Rainy and windless days are poor prospects.

Leaf Litter Has Its Advantages



It is autumn, the leaves are dropping, and it's time to rake them up. For many this is an opportunity to add them to their compost pile. For some who have a wooded lot you may decide to go natural and not rake but allow them to become leaf litter.

Leaf litter is a type of plant litter also called leaf mold or tree litter. The litter not only consists of leaves, but bark and twigs that have dropped to the ground. This organic matter serves as habitat for native rodents, shrews, and salamanders and may also be used by woodland songbirds to make nests. Leaf litter can be considered the "layer A", the first layer of the soil.

As the leaf litter decomposes, it becomes humus. Leaf litter and humus slow down rainfall run-off reducing erosion. Humus is brown or black and can be partially or wholly decayed vegetable or animal matter. This is considered the "layer B" of soil or the duff layer. It provides the nutrients for plants and increases the ability of soil to hold water. You can determine if soil has a lot of humus in it if it appears rich and dark. This dark color helps warm up the soil in the spring.

If you have a compost pile the leaf litter you add to it will become humus. If possible chop or shred the leaves before adding them. You may also add leaf mold (semi-composted leaves), wood chips and bark. As they eat and reproduce, the bacteria and fungi found on the surface of organic matter decompose this material to create humus. To encourage this process in your compost pile, turn or stir the pile on a regular basis.

If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out
our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

Acknowledgements:

- Photograph of Alternate-leaf Dogwood Tree, Leaves and inset flower close-up courtesy of Steven J. Baskauf, Ph.D., Bioimages, <http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu>
 - Photograph of Two Black vultures on a tree branch, courtesy of Missouri Dept. of Conservation.
 - Photograph of Two Turkey vultures standing on lawn courtesy of National Park Service.
 - Photograph of Black vulture in flight courtesy of Marshall Iliff, USGS, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Bird Identification Center.
 - Photograph of Turkey vulture in flight courtesy of A. Wilson, USGS, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Bird Identification Center.
 - Photograph of Sparrow Hawk courtesy of Dave Menke, US Fish & Wildlife Service.
 - Photograph of Coopers Hawk courtesy of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Office of Science, US Dept. of Energy.
 - Photograph of garden path made with leaf litter courtesy of Moosey's Country Garden - www.mooseyscountrygarden.com/beth-chatto-gardens/beth-chatto-gardens-autumn.html
 - Photograph of Person's hands holding up sample of leaf litter humus courtesy of USDA Forest Service.
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Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

Wild Acres

Habitat for Wildlife

Wildlife & Heritage Home

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